



Department of Justice

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - Thomas L. Sansonetti, Assistant Attorney General for the Justice Department's Environmental and Natural Resources Division, announced the filing of a charge in Tacoma, Washington against two individuals for violating the Marine Mammal Protection Act for allegedly shooting at sea lions while they were sport fishing for salmon.

North and Watson have each been charged with a single count of violating the Marine Mammal Protection Act for having shot at and for having killed a sea lion. These violations carry a penalty of imprisonment of up to one year in prison and a fine of up to \$100,000.

According to the information filed by the Justice Department, defendants Richard V. North and Rodney D. Watson violated the Marine Mammal Protection Act in March 2002 when they shot at the sea lions that were feeding in the area. During two days in March, North and Watson were sport fishing for salmon on the Columbia River along the Washington State riverbank. North and Watson took turns firing a .22 caliber rifle at sea lions that were foraging for fish nearby in the river. North succeeded in shooting one of the sea lions in the head, causing the sea lion to thrash about and bleed profusely from the head area. The sea lion dove and surfaced several times in this condition, and then disappeared.

Sea lions inhabit the waters of the Pacific Northwest, and range up and down the west coast. Sea lions can live for up to 20 years and can range in size from 500 to 1,000 pounds. Sea lions commonly forage for salmon in Pacific Northwest waters. All sea lions are protected from harassment and killing by the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

The investigation of this case was lead by Special Agents of the National Marine Fisheries Service. The case is being prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Office, Western District of Washington, and the Wildlife and Marine Resources Section of the U.S. Department of Justice.

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